



File Code: 1950

Date: February 20, 2004

Dear Interested Party:

The Butte and Jefferson Ranger Districts of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) are initiating travel and access management planning for the Whitetail-Pipestone area. Many of you may recall that we had started this planning effort in the 1990s, but due to budget constraints and other priorities, we had to place this project on the back burner. We are now ready to resume the Whitetail-Pipestone travel management environmental analysis with a targeted decision date of December 2004. This analysis will review the current road and trail systems with the intent of determining the appropriate road/trail system and the type of uses on them.

The Responsible Official is Thomas K. Reilly, BDNF Forest Supervisor, who will make his decision based on the results of this environmental analysis. Tom has directed the Butte and Jefferson Ranger Districts to take the lead in performing this analysis and preparing the Environmental Impact Statement.

Location: The Whitetail-Pipestone analysis area encompasses approximately 270,000 acres of public land lying roughly between Butte, Whitehall, Boulder and Basin. The planning boundaries are: starting from Whitehall, follow State Highway 2 west to the Continental Divide at Pipestone Pass, following the Continental Divide to near Homestake Pass, west along Blacktail Creek toward Butte, following Interstate 90 and I-15 north to Boulder, then south on State Highway 69 to Hadley Park road, then crossing over the Bull Mountain range to Whitetail Road and south to Whitehall. Refer to map (click on A thru K to view detailed maps).

Purpose and Need: The purpose of this action is to define a transportation system (roads and trails) to provide a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. A condition of this transportation system is that it can be properly maintained. We will provide access for administration, permitted uses and to private lands. The statewide OHV EIS and decision directed the BDNF to identify its high priority travel management areas. The Whitetail-Pipestone area was identified because of the high level of motorized use. Also the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has already made travel management decisions in the Pipestone area and the Forest Service needs to complete its travel management planning to complement BLM's decisions. We are experiencing some user conflicts that need to be resolved. Finally, we are concerned about public safety because of the mixed traffic on passenger roads (i.e., Delmoe Lake Road) and hazards on low standard roads and trails.

History and Current Status: Much of the analysis area has seen extensive road and trail developments in the past 140 years. In the later half of the 1800s, the miners developed many roads into these mountains to access their claims and to haul timber out to support the mining operations. After that initial flurry of road building, new roads were constructed at a much slower rate. In the later half of the 1900s, the Forest Service started building roads, primarily to



access timber and to a lesser extent for recreational purposes. User created 4x4 “troads” have been added to the landscape as recreationist, permittees, and others repeatedly drove cross-country in the more open, gentle terrain. Throughout these 140 years of road creation, little regard was placed on transportation planning. The end result is a road network that is often poorly located, creating watershed and other resource problems. Many of the roads are no longer used.

Recreational riding in the area came on strong in the 1970s and has been increasing ever since. The first recreational riding probably started on the many old roads. Mining activities had essentially ceased and those abandoned roads provided great riding opportunities for “jeeps” and motorcycles. The advent of all terrain vehicles (ATVs) in the last 20 years created a whole new mode of motorized recreational use and has become the number one riding choice. The ATV riders have sought out the long ago abandoned mining roads as their principal routes. Some “user created trails” have been made as the ATV riders rode cross-country to connect these old roads. The relatively gentle terrain and open timbered areas in the lower elevations allowed for easy cross-country riding. User created trails by definition are unplanned, thus many of these trails are creating problems similar to the unplanned road network.

The Whitetail-Pipestone analysis area can be described in two distinct development and use types. The aforementioned description applies to the developed portion, which is approximately 40% of the area. The undeveloped areas (60%) include the Whitetail-Haystack-O’Neil (W-H-O) Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA) located in the center of the analysis area and the area between Homestake and Pipestone Passes. The W-H-O IRAs and Homestake-Pipestone are essentially unroaded (there may be some old roads, long ago abandoned) and only a few motorized trails (mostly single tracks). The analysis map shows the IRA boundaries.

The BDNF has the road and trail information in our Geographic Information System (GIS) database. Our inventoried roads and trails are complete. Most of the unclassified roads and trails are also in our database. Some of the less obvious (usually short, dead-end routes) unclassified roads/trails are not in our database. During this comment period, you will be given the opportunity to identify roads/trails you feel are important to add in this planning process.

In January 2001, the Regional Forester made his state-wide Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) decision no longer allowing motorized use off existing roads and trails. His decision does allow for continued use on the existing user created trails and “troads”. The decision also directed each National Forest in Montana to prioritize the Forests’ travel areas and do site specific travel management to determine what the best road/trail system should be.

The BLM-Butte Field Office recently completed its travel planning for its lands within the Whitetail-Pipestone analysis area. Implementation of the decision began in 2003 with signing and reconstruction of the identified system trails and closure of the trails identified for obliteration.

The Jefferson Ranger District currently has a travel management plan for the Galena area (from Bear Gulch to North Fork of Little Boulder River). This current travel plan appears to be working quite well, as evidenced by little or no public comments in the 1990s planning efforts.

On-the-ground acceptance of the travel plan is good, with few travel violations. Most people accept the seasonal road and trail restrictions for hunting season and/or winter range purposes. Except for some minor tweaking to address site-specific situations, we do not propose changing the current travel management in this area.

The BDNF is currently making its final plans for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) from Elk Park to Pipestone Pass. The national direction for the CDNST is for only non-motorized use on new trail segments. Because the proposed CDNST follows a portion of the Nez Perce Trail (currently motorized), the plans call for designating this trail as non-motorized. The CDNST decision is scheduled for the spring of 2004. Decisions made for the CDNST will be incorporated in the Whitetail-Pipestone analysis and will not be subject to changes in this Whitetail-Pipestone planning effort.

Snowmobiling has not been a big recreational activity in the Whitetail-Pipestone area. This mountain range does not receive enough snow below 7,000 feet to attract snowmobilers. The areas above 7,000 feet do receive more snow, but dense timber through most of this zone restricts snowmobile travel. Traditional snowmobile areas are Whitetail Reservoir/Little Boulder Park and Hadley Park where the open, gentle terrain provides off trail riding. While these areas are not destination areas for the larger snowmobiling community, they are important for a few local snowmobilers who enjoy riding into these areas 2-3 times a winter. The predicted future snowmobile activity is not expected to increase much beyond current use because of the limited riding opportunities. User conflicts are not a big concern.

Proposed Action:

Rationale of Proposal Development

As stated in the Purpose and Need, the primary objective of this project is to define a transportation system (roads and trails) to provide a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, as well as providing access for administration, permitted uses and to private lands. A condition of this transportation system is that it can be properly maintained. Because we started this travel planning in the 1990s, which included considerable public involvement, we have good information on the physical conditions of the affected environment as well as the social considerations. Based on this information, we have developed a proposed action to address the purpose and the issues that were identified earlier, and have incorporated the latest information and management direction.

This planning effort is broken down into its two basic components: roads and trails. For the roads portion, we are reviewing the existing roads following the Roads Analysis Process (RAP), an established protocol that looks at the benefits (values) the roads offer and at the resource impacts (risks) they place on the land. A composite value/risk is produced for each road to help the decision maker decide what to do with each road (i.e., maintain, improve, remove, seasonal travel restrictions, etc). The Proposed Action incorporates the road management recommendations from the RAP.

For the trail portion, we looked at the existing trail network (both system and user created trails) that have been GPSed and entered into our GIS database. In selecting the proposed trail system, we used a set of trail attributes that contribute to the recreation opportunities (loop system; leads to interesting points like vistas, historic, geologic, etc). Most of the short, dead-end unclassified roads/trails are not included because they do not meet the trail attributes. We matched our proposed trails with the BLM system trails. In addressing some of the conflicts between trail users, we propose some separation between motorized and non-motorized uses based on the development of the area (roaded vs unroaded). The Continental Divide is proposed to be non-motorized to meet the intent of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail management direction. We are proposing only minor travel adjustments in the Galena area because the existing travel management plan is working. Recognizing that we could not practically maintain all those trails, we are suggesting reducing some miles of trails while still providing good trail riding opportunities. The Proposed Action displays the trail proposals based on these criteria.

We are not considering changing the current snowmobile use, as we see little actual on-the-ground user conflicts. Non-motorized recreationists do not normally reach the areas snowmobiles use. Because the future snowmobile use is not expected to change, we do not foresee future conflicts developing.

Description of Proposed Action

The proposed action deals primarily with the existing roads and trails, and for the most part does not include whole new routes, except for trail sections described below.

Concerning roads, this proposal does not address reconstruction or relocation. Rather, the road decisions will deal with the intended management objective for each existing road, and includes such categories as:

1. maintenance level objectives (5 levels, ranging from closing to all motorized vehicles to paved roads for passenger cars)
2. Seasonally close to motorized use to accomplish some resource or recreation objective
3. Convert from road to trail system. (note: this conversion may include allowing full-sized 4x4 vehicles, ATV/motorcycles, or non-motorized travel as shown in the proposal)
4. Decommission or obliterate (permanently close to all motorized use).

Concerning trails, the proposed action does include reconstruction and short relocations where needed to address the resource and safety concerns identified. Many of the motorized “troads” and trails are in good conditions and would require little or no additional maintenance to meet trail standards. Some trail segments would require heavy maintenance to meet Forest Service trail standards (tread widening; removing unsafe obstacles such as rocks, ruts, logs; water dips). Live stream crossings for motorized use would have special mitigation measures such as bridges, hardened fords, and/or graveled trail surfaces to the approaches. Some steep trail sections may be graveled. A few old “mining” roads and the user created trails are not situated in the best

locations, and whereas the general trail corridors are acceptable, relocating the routes away from problem areas would be beneficial to the resources and to the trail user. These relocations are generally less than one-quarter mile and most are under 200 yards. An estimated 3% of the existing road/trail system would be relocated. A sign plan would be implemented to provide direction, information, accepted uses, and safety.

Five new motorized trail segments outside existing trail corridors are proposed. Two short new trails (each about one-half mile) are proposed that deal with rerouting ATVs off the Delmoe Road for safety reasons. One is southeast of Delmoe Lake and would be located around two private parcels of land (Pappas Place). The other is at Halfway Creek. A third short segment would cross Halfway Creek above the Finn Cabins to address a trail safety concern. A fourth short section at the east end of Spring Creek trail avoids private land. A fifth short segment in Moose Creek (south of Homestake Pass) connects two existing old roads and avoids private property and directs ATVs off the Rader Creek road for safety reasons. These five trail construction proposals are identified on the project map.

The proposed action calls for seasonal motorized restrictions, primarily to provide a non-motorized hunting experience in the Ratio Mountain/Dry Mountain area and in Pole Canyon/Whiskey Gulch area. We propose allowing ATVs for game retrieval in these areas.

Most trails in the W-H-O IRAs and in the Homestake-Pipestone area would be designated as non-motorized. Some heavy maintenance and short reroutes would be necessary on certain trail segments to meet trail standards.

Because the roads data information is rather complicated, we have lumped some road uses to simplify the map and table display. For example, rather than showing the various maintenance levels, we are showing what roads are open to full-sized vehicles. The map shows the seasonal restrictions that we are proposing as well as roads closed year-round to full-sized vehicles. For those of you who need more detailed information concerning road management objectives, please contact the Jefferson Ranger District.

The existing condition has many miles of unclassified roads and trails (user created) that are currently not on any road or trail inventory. We will review these unclassified roads/trails and the proposed action will either reclassify them as roads and include on road system (very few); reclassify as "4x4 travelway", ATV trail, or non-motorized trail and include on trail inventory; or declare as closed and obliterate. All unclassified roads/trails not included in the road or trail system inventory would be closed and obliterated.

4x4 travelways are low standard roads intended for only high clearance vehicles, ATVs and motorcycles. ATV and motorcycles and their drivers do not have to be street legal to ride on them. They are subject to 4x4 travelways seasonal travel restrictions. Non-motorized users are welcome to use these roads.

Motorized trail use infers ATVs and motorcycles. ATV/motorcycles may only use closed roads if these road segments are needed to complete proposed trail routes. They are subject to road and trail seasonal travel restrictions. Non-motorized users are welcome to use these trails.

Non-motorized trail use infers hikers, horse riders and mountain bikers. These users are not subject to any road/trail seasonal restrictions or closures.

Because the amount of work to implement the road and trail decisions, we estimate the timeframe to complete this work to be 5 years or more. We would prioritize the work to ensure the most critical work is accomplished first.

This table summarizes and compares the current and proposed uses:

System Roads:	Current	Proposed
Open yearlong to all motorized vehicles	217	139
Seasonally open to all motorized vehicles	87	35
Not open to motorized vehicles	12	238*
Unclassified Roads (not on system road inventory)	182	These are all converted to either system roads, system trails (4x4 travelway or ATV), or closed (obliterated)
System Trails:		
Open yearlong as 4x4 travelways)	This category did not exist under current condition	34
Open seasonally as 4x4 travelways	This category did not exist under current condition	4
Open yearlong to ATVs & motorcycles	57	73**
Open seasonally to ATVs & motorcycles	23	45
Non-motorized	37***	70
Unclassified ATV trail (not on system trail inventory)	20	These are all converted to either system trails (ATV or non-motorized) or closed (obliterated)

* Includes Level 1 maintenance roads that remain on road inventory; roads permanently closed & removed from road inventory; & unclassified roads to be closed. Consult Roads Analysis Process for recommended road management objectives.

** Includes 3 miles of new ATV trails.

*** Includes Continental Divide National Scenic trail & Maude S Canyon trail not yet on landscape & Nez Perce trail being converted from motorized to non-motorized (total: 36 miles) (rationale: CDNST decision soon to be released).

Due to the large size of the project area map we are working with, we are not sending it out with this letter. You may review or receive the working project map by:

- Click here to view area map or visit: www.fs.fed.us/r1/b-d/deis/scoping_letters.htm
- Visit Butte or Jefferson Ranger District offices (Business hours are 8:00 to 4:30 MST)
- Request map to be sent to you

Commenting:

We would appreciate receiving your comments by March 22, 2004. Please address your comments to the Responsible Official for this project:

Tom Reilly, Forest Supervisor
Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Management
C/o Terry Sexton
3 Whitetail Road
Whitehall, MT 59759

Those wishing to comment by telephone should contact Eric Tolf, Project Leader, or me at (406) 287-3223 or (800) 433-9206.

Electronic comments may be submitted to: comments-northern-beaverhead-deerlodge-jefferson@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain the project name, Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Management, when you are submitting comments. Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect, or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Comments must be substantive and specific to the proposed activities and area being analyzed. They should include: (1) name, address, telephone number, and organization represented, if any; (2) title of the document on which the comment is being submitted; (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider; and (4) signatures. Each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments, or verify their identity upon request. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss this proposal further, please call Eric Tolf or me at (406) 287-3223.

Sincerely,

/s/
TERRY J. SEXTON
District Ranger